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Louisiana business owner pleads guilty to oil spill violations

BATON ROUGE - An oil production company based in Lafayette Parish and its president pleaded guilty yesterday to violations stemming from an oil spill that occurred in 2016.

In March 2018, BPR Energy, Inc., and its president, Bernard P. Robichaux, 48, were indicted for violations of Louisiana's Pollutant Discharge Elimination System related to an oil spill from a tank at Petro-Hurst Oil in Iberville Parish, an oil production facility operated by BPR Energy, Inc.

Yesterday, BPR Energy, Inc., pleaded guilty to a felony count for the knowing violation of provisions of Louisiana Pollutant Discharge Elimination System, specifically for failing to notify LDEQ and other appropriate agencies of the discharge. BPR Energy, Inc. was ordered to pay a \$50,000 fine.

Robichaux pleaded guilty to a negligent violation of provisions of Louisiana Pollutant Discharge Elimination System, specifically for discharging a pollutant into the waters of the state without a permit. He was ordered to pay a \$10,000 fine and sentenced to two years of probation. In addition, he was ordered to pay \$5,000 to LDEQ and \$5,000 to the Louisiana State Police as reimbursement of costs for each agency's role in the investigation.

The Louisiana Environmental Crimes Task Force comprising agents from the U.S. EPA's Criminal Investigation Division, LDEQ's Criminal Investigation Section, Louisiana State Police and the Louisiana Department of Wildlife and Fisheries conducted the investigation, with assistance from the Iberville Sheriff's Department and the Iberville Fire Department.

A subsequent cleanup was undertaken by a remediation contractor.

"Any person or business discharging a pollutant, whether intentionally or accidentally, has a moral, ethical and legal obligation to inform LDEQ and appropriate authorities as soon as possible," LDEQ Secretary Dr. Chuck Carr Brown said. "Those who fail to do so will be prosecuted to the fullest extent of the law, as the blatant pollution of our state's air, soil and water will not be tolerated."

The mission of the Louisiana Department of Environmental Quality is to protect the environment and public health. Anyone with knowledge of any spills, releases, odors, fish kills, open burning, waste tires, illegal dumping and any other types of environmental incidents should contact the department at (225) 219-3640, or Toll Free 1-888-763-5424.